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PERSPECTIVES ON THE WORLD
By Edward Neilan

Exchange program fraught with perils

U.S. Information Agency Director Charles Z. Wick awakened in Moscow this morning in an upstairs bedroom at Spaso House — the U.S. ambassador's residence — on his first-ever trip to the Soviet Union and must have wondered aloud how far he was from Hollywood.

Mr. Wick is over there on a two-week official visit to administer the new U.S.-U.S.S.R. cultural accords signed at the Geneva summit and to hold meetings with top Soviet officials to discuss implementation of the agreement.

There are some Americans who feel that this resumption of U.S.-Soviet exchanges — particularly in scientific areas — is premature and represents a threat to U.S. national security unless the program is handled differently than in the past. Making sure that Moscow does not exploit the exchanges to its advantage is part of Mr. Wick's job.

On his departure from Washington, Mr. Wick described the accords as, "representing a new starting point in U.S.-Soviet relations from which other significant and mutually beneficial agreements can be constructed."

The new accord, which renews and expands exchanges canceled in 1980 as a result of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, emphasizes art, academic and educational exchanges. It also calls for more exchange of publications and will allow the Soviets to continue distributing the monthly magazine Soviet Life in this country, while the U.S.-produced magazine, America Illustrated, will be sold in the Soviet Union.

Mr. Wick is also looking into the possibility of further television exchanges, such as the one which carried New Year's messages by President Reagan and General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev.

One rumor, possibly facetious, heard in the hallways over at the U.S. Information Agency, is that Mr. Wick will try to arrange a televised exchange between the head of the Soviet KGB and Central Intelligence Agency chief William Casey.

The exchange issue is no laughing matter to Mikhail "Misha" Tsypkin, The Heritage Foundation's Salvatori Fellow in Soviet Studies. He charges that in the past, the Soviets have used the exchange program to obtain information about militarily significant technology.

A Soviet emigre educated at Moscow University and Harvard University, Mr. Tsypkin says that while Moscow has sent ballet troupes and art exhibits to the United States, it has been mainly Soviet scientists who have visited American research centers. By arranging for their scientists to be placed in the American scientific community, the Soviets have obtained valuable information which they would not have been able to secure elsewhere.

Intelligence sources have confirmed that past exchanges have resulted in the Soviets obtaining information on U.S. missiles and space programs, acoustical data for developing low-frequency sonars for submarines, information on aerial photography, magnetic recording systems, lasers and other developments with military applications.

It is argued that the presence of Soviet scientists at American research centers and universities tells the Soviets nothing they could not learn by reading American scientific literature. What that argument fails to grasp, however, is that although Soviet theoretical science is generally strong, the U.S.S.R. encounters constant problems translating theoretical discoveries into hardware.

Arthur Alexander, the Rand Corp.'s leading expert on the Soviet weapons acquisition process, says the critical information is know-how which is something the Soviets cannot find in technical journals.

Says Mr. Alexander: "It requires personal contact, and frequently, dedicated effort by both parties. This applies to transfer not only of know-how concerning a device or process, but also to purely theoretical information. Exchange programs help close this gap."

An effort must be made — presumably this is part of Mr. Wick's agenda this week in Moscow — to prevent the Soviet Union from manipulating the expanded exchange program in any way that damages American national security.

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